

S E C R E T ROME 001625

SIPDIS

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TAGS: ETTC EU IT LY PREL EUN

SUBJECT: ITALIAN REQUEST FOR EU EXCEPTION TO LIBYA ARMS EMBARGO

REF: TEKACH-KILNER EMAIL 4/11/03

CLASSIFIED BY: ECONOMIC MINISTER-COUNSELOR SCOTT KILNER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) (D)

¶1. (SBU) ON THE BASIS OF REF EMAIL, ECMIN RAISED RECENT REPORTS THAT THE GOI HAD ASKED THE EU TO RELAX THE ARMS EMBARGO AGAINST LIBYA DURING AN APRIL 11 MEETING WITH MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE MIDDLE EAST ANTONIO BADINI.

¶2. (C) BADINI CONFIRMED THAT THIS WAS CORRECT, EXPLAINING THAT A FEW WEEKS AGO THE GOI HAD INITIATED AN EFFORT TO GAIN EU AGREEMENT TO REVIEW THE ARMS EMBARGO LIST. IF THIS AGREEMENT WERE OBTAINED, BADINI SAID THE GOI'S OBJECTIVE WOULD BE TO ELIMINATE CERTAIN ITEMS FROM THE "OUTDATED" EMBARGO LIST, SUCH AS PATROL BOATS, WHICH "ARE CLEARLY NOT EVEN DUAL USE." HE FURTHER CONFIRMED THAT WHAT IS DRIVING ITALIAN ACTIONS IS A STRONG DESIRE TO HELP LIBYA PATROL ITS COASTLINE MORE EFFECTIVELY TO STEM THE FLOW OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM AFRICA. THE IMMIGRATION PROBLEM, HE STRESSED, IS AN "IMMEDIATE THREAT" WHICH THE GOI NEEDS TO ADDRESS URGENTLY. BADINI ESTIMATED THAT A FINAL EU DECISION ON THE ITALIAN REQUEST WOULD TAKE 3-4 MONTHS.

3.(S) ECMIN REPLIED THAT, WHILE THE U.S. UNDERSTOOD THE SEVERITY OF ITALY'S ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION PROBLEM, WE STRONGLY OPPOSED ANY RELAXATION OF THE ARMS EMBARGO UNTIL LIBYA HAD DEMONSTRATED COMPLETE ABANDONMENT OF TERRORISM. ECMIN FURTHER TOOK STRONG EXCEPTION TO BADINI'S CHARACTERIZATION OF PATROL BOATS AS "NOT DUAL USE," REMINDING THE DG THAT

SECRETARY POWELL FELT SO STRONGLY ABOUT THE RECENT CASE OF ITALIAN FAST BOATS FOR IRAN THAT HE HAD RAISED THE ISSUE DIRECTLY WITH FM FRATTINI. THE SECRETARY HAS BEEN APPRECIATIVE OF ITALIAN ACTIONS TO STOP THAT DELIVERY, EVEN WRITING FRATTINI TO THANK HIM. IT WOULD BE A SERIOUS MISTAKE TO HAVE TO RETRACE THE SAME PATH AGAIN WITH RESPECT TO LIBYA.

FINALLY, ECMIN NOTED PRESS REPORTS THAT VERY DAY OF IRANIAN PATROL BOATS HARASSING U.S. WARSHIPS IN THE PERSIAN GULF.

4.(S) BADINI ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE IRAN FAST-BOATS CASE, BUT TRIED TO ARGUE THAT "LIBYA IS NOT IRAN." HE MAINTAINED THAT LIBYA HAD TAKEN "VERY LARGE, IMPORTANT STEPS TO FIGHT TERRORISM." BADINI ADDED THAT HE AND OTHERS WOULD BE GLAD TO SIT DOWN AND DISCUSS "ANY EVIDENCE YOU HAVE TO THE CONTRARY." IF THE EU APPROVED THE REVIEW OF THE EMBARGO LIST, THE GOI WOULD ALSO BE WILLING TO CONSULT WITH THE U.S. ON TECHNICAL CONCERN ABOUT PROPOSED DELETIONS FROM THE LIST. ECMIN REITERATED THAT THE U.S. DID NOT SHARE ITALY'S ANALYSIS, AND THAT WE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY WISH TO DISCUSS FURTHER THE GOI'S EFFORT TO REVIEW THE LIBYA ARMS EMBARGO.

¶5. (C) ON APRIL 15 ECONOFFS RAISED THE PROPOSED EXPORT TO LIBYA WITH GIANPAOLO SCARANTE, DEPUTY DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR TO PM BERLUSCONI. SCARANTE TOLD US THAT BADINI ALREADY HAD RELAYED TO HIM U.S. CONCERNS, AND HAD ALSO TOLD HIM THAT THE GOI DID NOT EXPECT TO RECEIVE EU SUPPORT FOR THE GOI PROPOSAL. (NOTE - IN THE PROVISIONAL READOUT OF THE APRIL 14 GAERC MEETING, FORWARDED TO US BY USEU, THE COUNCIL CALLED FOR THE CREATION OF A WORKING GROUP ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION "TO EXAMINE THE SITUATION SO AS TO ENABLE THE COUNCIL TO EVALUATE HOW THE EU MIGHT COOPERATE SO AS TO ENHANCE LIBYA'S CAPACITY TO FIGHT ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION." THERE IS NO MENTION OF THE EU LOOSENING ITS ARMS EMBARGO, WHICH IT EXPLICITLY STATES "REMAINS IN PLACE.")

¶6. (C) ACTING ECMIN AND ECONOFF FURTHER RAISED OUR CONCERN APRIL 15 WITH NEWLY ARRIVED MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION GIANDOMENICO MAGLIANO. WHILE WE ACKNOWLEDGED ITALY'S NEED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, WE WISHED TO MAKE THE GOI AWARE OF OUR OPPOSITION TO THE EXPORT OF ANY ITEMS WHICH COULD SUPPORT LIBYAN TERRORIST ACTIVITY. THOUGH APPARENTLY UNFAMILIAR WITH THE ISSUE, HE DID NOTE PM BERLUSCONI'S PLEDGE TO THE LIBYANS DURING A VISIT IN OCTOBER 2002 TO EXAMINE COOPERATION TO FIGHT ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION. (AFTER A MEETING BETWEEN FM FRANCO FRATTINI AND LIBYAN FM ABD AL-RAHMAN MOHAMMAD SHALGAM IN FEBRUARY 2003, THE MFA ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT SAYS, IN PART, "ITALY IS SEEKING ALSO TO INVOLVE THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SUPPORT OF LIBYA'S PROGRAM DESIGNED TO COMBAT" ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION.) WE TOLD MAGLIANO THAT THE U.S. WOULD CONTINUE TO OPPOSE ANY FURTHER EFFORTS TO LOOSEN THE EU ARMS EMBARGO AGAINST LIBYA. SEMBLER

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